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THE RAILWAY IN NEWFOUNDLAND.

BY

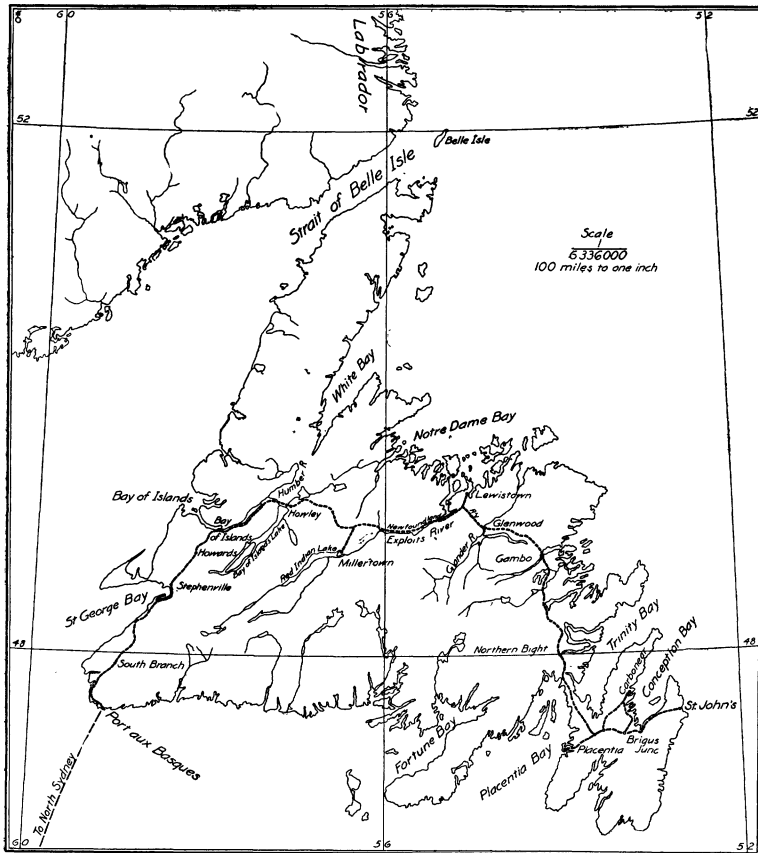
CHARLES M. SKINNER.

Civilized man must breathe uncivilized air and touch uncivilized earth now and again, or pass into the decadence inevitable to men and nations that refuse the healing of nature. Consciousness of this fact and the distress of city living are widening the playgrounds of the earth, and the agencies for reaching them multiply faster than they like who prefer to hold some lands unspoiled. One of the most interesting yet least known of these districts is Newfoundland, that blocks St. Lawrence Gulf, with an area commensurate with that of Ireland and Wales, or of Ohio, and a population of 217,000.

A factor in the future development of this island is the railway, opened a couple of years ago, and now showing a trackage of 638 miles, narrow gauge, yet supplied with most of the comforts expected by travellers, and operating a "sleeper" and "diner" on each first-class train that plies across the island in twenty-eight hours, three times a week, in each direction. The fortunes of this enterprise are still in abeyance, for, built at the instance of Government, it has reverted to the contractor, Mr. R. G. Reid, that he may be reimbursed for the work—a proceeding that has created much discontent. Mr. Reid has released back to the Government, however, the 2,000 miles of telegraph and 3,000,000 of the 5,000,000 acres granted to him, and is seeking Government sanction to sell or lease the road to a corporation. With the solution of the question of ownership and the settlement of the long misunderstanding with France about the fishing rights on the west shore, Newfoundland will compose itself.

Starting at the southwest corner of the island and aiming toward St. John's at its southeastern corner, the railroad makes a wide curve to the northward, describing in 548 miles what might have been covered in 350. Apart from the roughness of the coastal strip and the number of bays, coves, and ravines that could be crossed or looped only at much expense for bridges, there are reasons for this seeming errancy. The bend of the road opens a great forest section; it gives access to hunting and fishing districts; it serves the more important towns; and, mainly, it provides for settlement where it is most likely to be established when Newfoundland enlarges and varies its industries, which are now represented almost solely in fishing. At present only

the coast is inhabited. For a hundred miles at a stretch the train does not cross a road, and, excepting for a water tank or cabin of a section hand, the traveller sees no token of human occupancy save—the pity of it!—vast tracts of burned woodland, gray, ghostly, silent; millions of money wasted, coverts for birds and animals destroyed, the moss charred, the water lowered, miles of fertility made



THE RAILWAY ACROSS NEWFOUNDLAND.

desert. So little is still known of inner Newfoundland that lakes within rifle shot of this railroad are still mapped as conjectural, rivers are undefined by the surveyor, and mountains are named only because they show from a distance. The explorer who gets in his work before or after the flies and mosquitoes do theirs has interesting things to tell us. The great north arm of the island, 150 miles long

and 40 miles wide, is an inviting region, for within its coast-line practically nothing is known of it.* Yet there are no greater difficulties in travel here than in Quebec. The fogs that hang about the shores seldom drift inland or obscure the landscape for more than a few hours.

Newfoundland rises suddenly from the sea on the south in cliffs 1,800 feet high, which are whitened with snow till July. The plateau which they edge extends northwardly in broken ridges, and these hills, with the interlocking river systems and lake chains that fall into the valleys, follow a general direction of southwest to northeast. By interlocking, I mean to define that curious alternation of north and south-flowing streams that is characteristic of this country. It is beside these waters and along these valleys that population will spread when development arrives. Of the 40,200 square miles comprised in the island, only 135 are cultivated. As a native informed me, "We raises our own pattateys, and cabbidges, and turmits," and there are oats and barley, and some small fruits, the half-dozen starved-looking apple trees near St. John's promising no success with the larger ones. Grass grows richly where it has the chance, and it should be a good investment in a part of the world where hay sells as high as \$20 a ton, and in the sheltered vales grazing ought to be profitable. If the railroad merely stimulated the dairy interests, it would not have been created in vain.

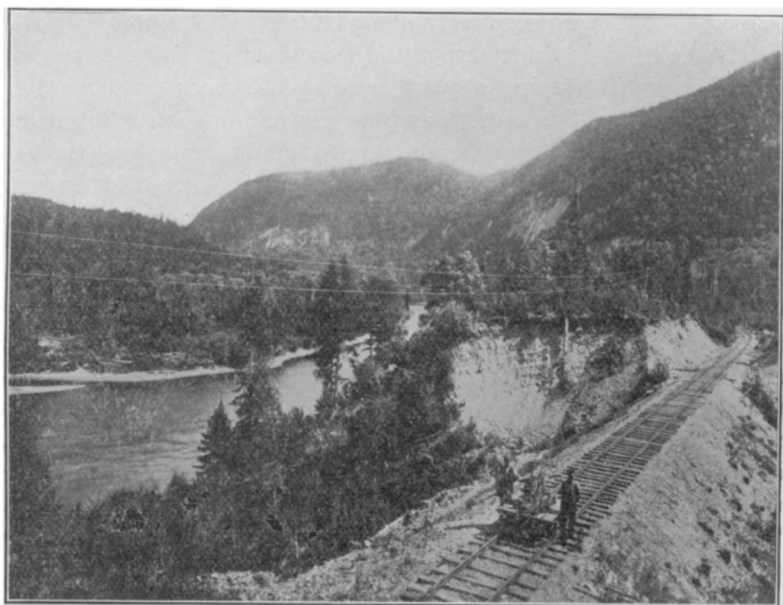
The stranger begins his journey across Newfoundland at Port aux Basques, reached in a night's journey from North Sydney, Cape Breton. For the first 70 miles he runs between the sea, visible across a sandy, windswept reach, and the backbone of the island, the Long Range, dark, half-timbered, flat-topped, pierced by recesses where last winter's drifts dissolve and cascade turbulently to the sea. Habitations are few and poor, mere shelters often, with hardly an attempt at the "pattateys and cabbidges"; but the timber, storm-bent and stunted, heightens as we turn inland, till, at the lovely Bay of Islands, with its environing domes 2,000 feet in altitude, we are reminded of the forests of the Adirondacks. The land, too, is in better heart, as we see from the gardens, the bits of lawn about the cottages, and the flowers of which Newfoundland has no lack, the glowing thickets of "gold-widow," the white knots of Labrador tea, the blue sceptres of the iris, the nodding pouches of the lady's slipper, the dull red

* *The Geographical Journal* for August, 1905, has a paper by Mr. H. C. Thomson describing a six-weeks' journey made with Mr. W. H. Burt through this region in 1904. A map of the route is given.

In the same periodical for October (p. 468) Mr. G. D. McGregor claims to have discovered camping-grounds of the Beothiks on the shores of Red Indian Lake.

disks of the pitcher plant, the big-leaved "hemlock," flowering white, the daisy, dandelion, and chamomile deserving mention. Never have I seen such a blaze of gold as the buttercups make about St. John's in midsummer, nor finer lilacs than bloom there in that season. The notes of our common birds are heard, and there are no snakes.

With little lift of grade, and following the considerable stream known as Harry's Brook, we strike the Humber, one of the rivers that so nearly split Newfoundland into an archipelago, for if it were sunk a few yards deeper into the sea it would be nine islands instead of one, all with the northeast-southwest axis. The Humber, broad in



THE HUMBER RIVER, NEWFOUNDLAND.

its lower reaches, narrows till we find its black torrent pouring westward through a gorge with tawny precipices overhanging a thousand feet above. We cross its tributary, Grand Lake, 56 miles long, at its foot, and then begins the climb toward the great barrens that roof the island and are feeding-grounds for caribou, which hunters are slaughtering by thousands, and which, like the human aborigines, the Beothuks, are doomed to extermination. The forest we are leaving, and that clothes much of the lower country, is of spruce, pine, fir, and tamarack; but there are fine specimens of birch, some maple, and the deep tangles of elder and various shrubs and field growths of

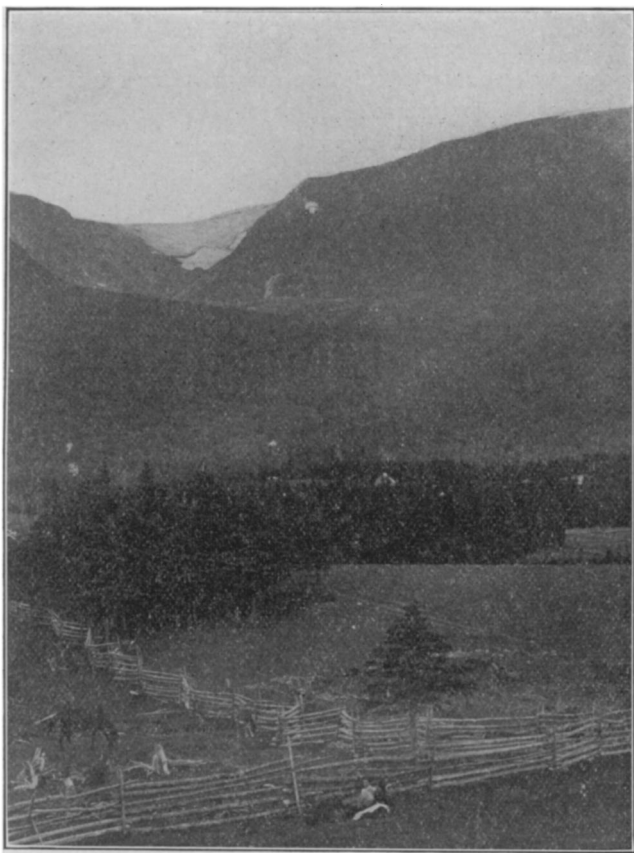
our own country betoken fertility whenever the land shall be claimed for agriculture or for ranching. The wood thins presently, discovering what might be taken for clearings; these spaces widen to fields; and at the fall of night we rise into the vast, cold solitudes where granite *tolts*, or peaks, crouch along the distance, lifting their heads toward the sunset; then the scene fades with an impression of immensity and the northern lights begin to dance.

These barrens are as impressive as the western plains, and resemble them at first glance; yet they differ, except in superficialities. The plains are dry; the barrens soggy, and threaded by a thousand rills. The plains are stony and dusty; the barrens, the boulders strewn here and there, are deceptively like pasture. The "moss," as they are also called, is a thick carpet, the woody stems of Indian tea and "goold-widdy" forming a warp, and grass, reeds, and reindeer-moss the woof. This carpet has been thickening for centuries, and although the surface appears dry and invites to rambles, you sink in it to the ankles, and sometimes to the knees. I am told that in a few places it is six feet deep. It holds the moisture which is visited on the island in rains and fogs, and it collects in unseen hollows where a surface growth of blue flag denotes its presence. One needs rubber boots in exploring the barrens, and he finds advantage in following the elk tracks, which avoid many pitfalls that the moss conceals. Yet there is little danger from swamp or quicksand.

The crest of the island, near its centre, is marked by a series of *tolts*, of which the Topsails and Hodges (2,200 feet) are conspicuous from the railroad, and, in crossing the divide at a height of 1,800 feet or so, one is apt to see white drifts beside the track, in the shadow of the snow fences, as late as July. For, although the cold is less intense than on our Western ranges, snow falls heavily in winter and traffic is stopped for weeks at a time. Gruesome tales are told of the sufferings of passengers when stalled fifty miles from a settlement.

At Dawe, which needs a microscope to discover it as a town, we reach the Exploits River, pouring from its sources in the Annieopsquolch Mountains, with many leaps and much chafing of its hilly shores, toward a bay filled with islands. We follow 40 of the 200 miles of this largest of the Newfoundland streams through wilderness, still unpeopled, then over a brief rise to the valley of the Gander, the streams of this country being often separated by the thinnest of partitions. And descending to these large, calm reaches, which are in marked contrast to the romantic cañon of the Humber, we still find the land clothed with primeval forest; but the hum of the saw-mill is heard in the land, and a tract half as large as New Jersey

will be deforested if the Harmsworth pulp concession becomes effective, to the detriment of the soil and springs—a circumstance overlooked by the people in their hope of gain from the industrial development. There is hardly a break in the wilderness between the east coast and the west for agricultural or grazing purposes, and few present occasions for an interior village, except at the granite quarry



THE VALLEY OF THE LITTLE CODROY, NEWFOUNDLAND.

near the Topsails. Nor need we look for an immediate settlement if the fisheries continue to prosper. They engage nearly a third of all the Newfoundlanders and represent almost the adult male population; still, there are 2,500 farmers, with an average of 34 acres apiece, and they raise cattle, sheep, hogs, and poultry; so that the agricultural idea is implanted, and some day there will be withdrawal

from the bleak, rough coast, with its icy besetment, and devotion to less heroic toil than the pursuit of cod and whales. Here along the Gander, with its fertile alluvium, is room for a million homes.

Crossing Terra Nova River, paralleling the east coast at a height along the hillsides and threatening the isthmus that unites Wales-like Avalon to the rest of the island, the settlements increase in size and number, and remarkable grades and loops are seen in circumventing the incisions which the ocean has made in the land. Not a little of this railroad work has a temporary look; the embankments are too steep, the shelves beside the river too narrow; the bends by which rocks and coves are avoided are too wide; indeed, the bed of the road is laid so rudely that sensitive passengers may experience sea-sickness. Not till we come to Avalon and run the last 80 miles of the trip do we feel ourselves allied to civilization once more, for houses appear in the landscape, property is fenced, and villages are discovered afar by the spires of their churches—Roman, Episcopal, and Methodist, which represent the faith of the colony. Roads, not ill built, wind across the stony hills and through woods of pine. Rarely a house gives token of having been built for more than mere expediency, yet there are few homes in Newfoundland that have the size and architectural importance of our ordinary suburban villas. Conformable to the featureless houses are the railroad stations, where each village assembles to stare at the passengers, but less rudely than in our own “deepos.” Indeed, one likes these people for a hearty, healthy, kindly race, poor, ignorant of books, but truthful, trustful, and unspoiled.

Where capital would have directed the cutting or tunnelling of a hill, the railroad zigzags over its top or detours about its flank, and miles will yet be saved through engineering economies; but the building of spurs, of which there are now but four, with a total of 90 miles, will wait the development of resources and the increase of the shore hamlets to towns. St. John's is the only city, and to that the train brings us, landing us at the head of its fjord amid a dubious odour of sewage and a dull outlook on wooden houses, but a picturesque, hospitable, restful place withal. Though in the latitude of Berne, Budapest, and Seattle, it is occasionally blocked by icebergs and floes that the Arctic current lodges at its gates.

Newfoundland invites the tourist because of its air, ocean-purified, ice-cooled; its moderate temperatures, seldom falling below zero or reaching 90°, though the winters are dreaded for their snows and winds; its remarkable scenery, for besides its hills, woods, ravines, caves, and barrens, its sea-wall has been carved by the elements into

a thousand impressive and fantastic shapes, while the icebergs add wonderful forms and colour; and, lastly, because of its restful isolation and simplicity. It invites the hunter and the fisherman but too loudly, for a terrible waste has been committed; yet the elk still haunt the barrens, and the bear and fox the woods, while the streams abound in trout and salmon. It invites the artist, who will discover in the villages nestling in the coves quaint forms in building, and hardy yet sometimes beautiful types of men and women. It invites the geologist and prospector, inasmuch as copper, iron, and some rarer metals are found in paying quantities—gold in amounts that warrant hope of more, coal in seams too shallow for profit yet promising relationship to the great beds of Cape Breton, and fossils and minerals of scientific interest, while the glacial erosions—the great folds, fractures, and intrusions in the rock foundations—deserve study.

But Newfoundland invites more than the visitor; it invites the settler. England's oldest colony is in touch with our markets; its port, the eastmost in North America, is three and one half days from Europe; its woods await the scientific forester; its mines the pick; its fields the plough; its rivers the harness of the manufacturer, miller, and power-maker. The climate is healthy; there is room to grow, and land is practically given away. Pioneer work is to be done for popular education and for internal improvements before the American ideal is reached, and when that occurs the charm of this out-of-the-world place may be dispelled. Yet in the westward set of immigration its development is inevitable, and in the changes that impend the social and industrial dynamic of the railroad must be considered.

GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD.

AFRICA.

OSTRICHES IN THE OUDTSHOORN DISTRICT OF CAPE COLONY.—This district of the Cape of Good Hope is girdled with mountains, and so difficult of access that there seemed to be little hope of raising bulky farm products for exterior markets. Its prosperity is a good illustration of adapting human activities to natural conditions. The *Agricultural Journal* of the Cape of Good Hope (Sept., 1905) says that the wealth of the district (which is a little north of Mossel Bay) in soil and water is very great, and that nothing was lacking but cheap transportation. With the development of irrigation it was found that lucerne (alfalfa), the king of fodder plants, grew finely wherever water was procurable; but the cultivation of